

Union Square Civic Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes – 2/19
Argenziano School, 6-8 P.M.

I. Introduction

Wig Zamore, chairman of the CAC, welcomes and opens the discussion for public comment.

II. Public Comment Period

- a. Role of the CAC: first priority is narrowing down the list of Master Developers to a short list; from there the CAC will look more intensely at proposals and Master Developer teams. CAC will make final recommendation to Somerville Redevelopment Authority, which owns the property on Block D-2. The selected Master Developer will be responsible for holding community charettes; community process is ongoing.
- b. Edward O'Donnell, Director of Economic Development, explains that meetings of the CAC are also to help inform the public, which is why there have been a series of presentations to CAC about the Redevelopment of Union Square, its history and the plan for moving forward.

III. Presentation by Edward O'Donnell

- a. Why the City chose to use a Master Developer:
 - i. The community process, SomerVision and Revitalization Plan led to the conclusion that a Master Development approach was well suited for Union Square.
 - ii. The City originally considered using a development partner only for Block D-2 around the new Green Line station. However, private sector speculation was already moving ahead on its own—developers began purchasing property throughout Union Square. The proposals submitted by private developers to the City were frequently not in line with the vision for Union Square (e.g. chain stores, residential above small scale retail and surface parking). At this point in time, the City began considering the use of a Master Developer to prevent piecemeal development that limits our ability to achieve the goals outlined in SomerVision.
 - iii. There are several advantages to using a Master Developer, including:
 - 1. Provides for a holistic, system-wide approach rather than an ad-hoc approach that treats each parcel or development site in isolation. By developing multiple sites, the master developer can phase development so product types and price points don't compete with each other and saturate the market;
 - 2. Accelerates and expanding transit-oriented development efforts by partnering with a development firm that can undertake multiple projects concurrently, thereby increasing the size and capacity of the agency's joint development team; and
 - 3. Increases the economies of scale by bundling several sites together to attract regional and national development firms with significant financial resources and experience with complex public/private projects.
- b. Responsibilities of a Master Developer:
 - i. Required to work with the Somerville Redevelopment Authority (SRA) regarding site assembly, infrastructure improvements and entitlements.

- ii. The Master Developer will be required to sign a Land Disposition Agreement (LDA) for each of the disposition blocks. The LDA will describe in detail the development to be constructed on each block, and will contain the safeguards, such as rights of reverter, ensure that the SRA's expectations as to any proposed project are fully met and that the project is constructed as proposed.
 - iii. The LDA will also require the Master Developer to work closely and in full cooperation with the MBTA and the GLX project.
 - iv. The Master Developer will work with the City and the SRA to develop a site design plan, a phasing plan, schedule and detailed financial plan.
 - v. The Master Developer will be obligated to attain the goals for an enhanced Union Square in a manner consistent with SomerVision and the USQ Revitalization Plan.
 - vi. The Master Developer will be responsible for engaging the CAC for its input. Over the longer term, it's expected that the CAC will provide input toward strategic planning decisions and development for the SRA and Master Developer.
- c. Expected timetable:
 - i. The enhancement of Union Square is based upon the same timetable of SomerVision, through 2030.
 - ii. Although it is expected that the first new development will reflect the Union Square Station's schedule (2016/17), other opportunities may arise.

IV. Committee Discussion, Public Comment

- a. How will the LDAs work where the SRA does not own land? The Master Developer will have to work with individual property owners through private sale and/or partnerships. The City, through the SRA, will only take property by eminent domain as an absolute last resort. As private sales occur, the SRA will help to shape the LDAs.
- b. Do the tenants of the properties that have already been sold in Union Square qualify for relocation benefits? This seems to be causing uncertainty for business owners. The City will consult its legal team to most appropriately answer this question.
- c. Does the RFQ ask development teams about their development *approaches*? Though it's not included in the qualification table in the RFQ, there is significant language in the RFQ that asks development teams to include their *approach* to development. The CAC can solicit additional information about these approaches during the developer presentations.
- d. How will the committee be able to compare presentations when each will likely be so different? It was suggested that development teams be asked to answer a few standard questions in order to help the CAC understand how each team compares to the others.
- e. The Powderhouse School process is illustrative; the City will provide CAC members with additional information to highlight how proposals were evaluated.
- f. It seems hard for the CAC to be able to make recommendations about a Master Developer when the teams were not asked to submit actual proposals for what they intend to build. Will the CAC help to shape what developers build? Wig Zamore notes that the Master Developer will be required to go through the MEPA environmental review process because of the size of the project, in which case the developer will have to outline specifics such as mix of uses that will be built, how many trips will be taken and by which transportation mode, etc.
- g. Will the development around the MBTA station open at the same time as the MBTA station? Not necessarily, but the MBTA station will be designed to allow for the Master Developer to build around the station.

- h. Affordable housing, open space and other thresholds are currently established through the City's zoning code. Once a Master Developer has been selected, and each parcel is being reviewed, these thresholds can be revisited.
- i. In the event that someone cannot attend the developer presentations, there will be a mechanism for CAC members to view a recorded presentation and provide comment.

V. Scheduling of Developer Presentations and Future Meetings

- a. The next series of meetings will be for Master Development teams to present their qualifications to the CAC. At each of the three meetings, three teams will present. Each team will have approximately 30 minutes to present, allowing time for CAC members to ask questions of the teams.
- b. Based upon responses from a CAC member poll, the meetings will be held as follows:
 - i. Wed., March 5th from 6-8 P.M. at the Argenziano School;
 - ii. Tues., March 11th from 6-8 P.M. at the Argenziano School; and
 - iii. Tues., March 18th from 6-8 P.M. at the Argenziano School.
- c. Parsons Brinkerhoff would like to present its infrastructure and roadway improvement plan to the CAC sometime the week of March 24th.

VI. Meeting adjourned at 7:34 P.M.